



ISSN: 0975-833X

RESEARCH ARTICLE

RESEARCH IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A PANACEA FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 30th September, 2013
Received in revised form
23rd September, 2013
Accepted 06th October, 2013
Published online 25th December, 2013

Key words:

Tertiary Education,
National Development,
Nigeria,
Transformation,
Intellectual Capacity.

ABSTRACT

Higher education in Nigeria was established for a definite purpose. The goals which are spelt out in the National Policy on Education are pursued through teaching, research and community service. Learning therefore at the tertiary level of education as explained by Babalola and Jaiyeoba (2008) could be described as being effective if it results in bringing about the expected transformation in the attitudes, skills and knowledge of higher education in students over a period of time. Invariably, the role of the University is not only to train future academics, but also to train technical workers and managers and to upgrade their knowledge when necessary. This means the academics themselves try hard to keep up-date on the most recent advances (which make quick progress around the world) in fundamental and technical knowledge. This could only be achieved through research work. This paper therefore looks into the goals of tertiary education in Nigeria. It as well discusses on the types of research carried out at the tertiary level of education. It discusses the importance of research on the economy. It equally discusses on why higher education in developing countries like Nigeria need research work. The paper concludes with recommendations on how to improve and encourage research work in higher education.

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INTRODUCTION

Research is the most important tool for advancing knowledge especially at the higher education. Research is defined by Osuala (1993) as the process of arriving at a dependable solution to problems through the planned and systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of data. Asika (2000) defined research as any organized enquiring that aims at providing information for solving identified problems. Research as perceived by Kearney (2010) is the scholarly work needed to arrive at finding new things or new knowledge. It is the process of creating value for knowledge. And no one today would argue the need for access to knowledge and capacity for analysis, in all societies, and the funding of higher education research and innovation (HERI) is widely accepted as a productive investment in developed countries. Many developing countries see such investment as pivotal and search ardently for mechanisms to enhance the impact and competitiveness of their system. It is also being that developing countries will need strategic investments in research in higher education in order to escape a vicious cycle of ignorance and underdevelopment. There is a strong view that higher education should respond in and through all three core function areas of teaching research and community engagement, through the development of new curricula and qualifications to address new education and training needs, through developing

appropriate research themes to address new knowledge. The forum for higher education research and knowledge had a simple but ambitious mission, thus:

1. To facilitate an increase in the pool of knowledge that is available and useable for social and economic development.
2. To contribute to the strengthening of the systemic and institutional dimension of its production, dissemination and utilization, especially in developing countries as the target and the "engine" of social development.

As a result of the changing dynamics of the knowledge society, Kearney (2010) is of the opinion that the third world countries should identify, select and adapt new knowledge to local needs without a sound basis for its management via research capacity. That the right of each and every nation to build its own solid research community should be reaffirmed and their important benefit reiterated such as; Learning therefore at the tertiary level of education as explained by Babalola and Jaiyeoba (2008) could be described as being effective if it results in bringing about the expected transformation in the attitudes, skills and knowledge of higher education in students over a period of time.

- Provision of local analysis and advice;
- Identification of relevant research agendas;
- critical thinking in higher education;
- Capacity to train future generations of researchers;

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- Stimulation of national innovation systems. Kearney (2010), agrees that these constitute the metal level of activity necessary to “build” and “sustain” the knowledge system. There is no doubt that higher education plays an essential role in the knowledge economy, it therefore becomes very paramount that university education ought to take research and innovation very seriously.

Goals of Tertiary Education in Nigeria

The goals of tertiary education as being explained by FRN should be to;

- Contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training;
- Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society;
- Develop the intellectual capacity of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments;
- Acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;
- Promote and encourage scholarship and community service;
- Forge and cement national unity; and
- Promote national and international understanding and interaction.

Tertiary educational institutions shall pursue these goals through;

- Teaching;
- Research and development;
- Virile staff development program;
- Generation and dissemination of knowledge;
- A variety of modes of programs including full-time, part-time, block-release, day-release, sandwich etc;
- Access to training funds such as those provided by the Industrial Training Fund (ITF);
- Maintenance of minimum educational standards through appropriate agencies;
- Inter-institutional co-operation;
- Dedicated services to the community through extra mural and extension services (Federal Republic of Nigeria, National Policy on Education, 2004: 36-37).

Nature of Research in Higher Education

Research is goal oriented in nature. It is the strategy adopted by scientists to answer questions raised on issues, phenomenal and events. It is systematically and logical. The goal of research is to discover laws, theories or generalizations that can be used in explanation, prediction and control of natural processes, social interaction and human behavior (Mbakwem 2005: 299). Research is like a scientist who quotes, profusely, the brilliant ideas of their thinker and makes use of them to advance knowledge and improve the lot of humanity. It is a painstaking, logical and systematic process. As explained by Obodozie (2001), it is a critical study that is closely tied to its objective nature. It is a process of critical thinking in that judgment is reserved until empirical evidence provides our speculations than to defend them. The nature of the research work involves the following procedure:

- Embarking on introductory reading.
- Identifying and precisely defining the problem
- Reading previous research on relevant topics.
- Deciding on techniques to be used for collecting and analyzing information.
- Selecting and defining the sample to be studied.
- Collecting the data
- Processing, analyzing and interpreting results.
- Writing up the report

Types of Research Prevalent in Nigerian Higher Education

Classification of research can be done according to purpose, methodology and setting under which evidences are collected. They may be classified with respect to the approach or strategy of solving a problem situation Obodozie (2001) grouped the following as sum of the types of research that could be carried out in an attempt to solve one problem or another. Although sum times overlap because some of the classifications are based on purpose, some on method, some on discipline and some others based upon area of study.

Survey Research

Survey research focuses on the population. It could either be descriptive or analytical. When the pieces of data collected are presented as they are without drawing inferences from further analysis, the survey is said to be descriptive. But if the researcher in the statement of the data goes beyond descriptive statistics into inferential statistics in comparing, extrapolating from the sample statistics, then the researcher is said to be doing analytical survey.

Historical Research

Historical research means the investigation into past event with a view to expose the past. It does not involve populations or cover very large area as explained by Ogoamaka (1992) Duyilemi and Duyilemi (2006) explain that historical research deals with current problems which can be solved only by going back to study particular events which have far reaching implications for an identified problem.

Correlation Research

Correlation research involves establishing the extent of relationship between two variables or among three or more variables. Correlation studies are used to establish causes and effect relationship.

Action Research

It is the kind of research the teacher conducts in the classroom situation for the purpose of solving some perceived problems that militate against effective teaching and learning. It is an innovative curriculum research which is indispensable for improving instruction.

Experimental Research

Experimental researches are usually carried out under laboratory setting especially in pure and applied sciences and

physiology. The essence of experimental research is to establish causes and effect.

Ex-Post Factor Research

This type of research could be regarded as comparative research. Ogoamaka (1992) explains that it involves finding out the effect of post factor on what happens afterwards. It entails determining if an event that took place in the past or a factor that was present in the past, has any effect on or causing a variable at the present or at the time of the research.

Importance of Research in Higher Education

The increasing recognition of the importance of research and the training of a highly skilled work force in positioning nations in a global knowledge-base economy at once elevate the importance of higher education and threaten many of their traditional values. Knowledge has always been power as well as a public good; access to it and its role in innovation determine both the place of nations in the world order and of individuals in society. Quoting "knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, it is and will be consumed, the goal is exchange. If knowledge ceases to be an end in itself, it loses its use value. Knowledge is now recognized as the driver of productivity and economic growth, leading to a new focus on the role of information, technology and learning in economic performance". Having said this, the importance of research in higher education for national development cannot be over emphasized. For example:

Knowledge Dividend

Kearney (2010) explains that systems of knowledge production today cover a vast range of entities inter-alia universities, public laboratories, research centers and think-tanks run by policy and civil society groups, industry and private sector and military complex. Thus, research has given new importance to national knowledge-oriented institutions, and often necessitates urgent efforts to renew systems and structures of higher education.

Promoting Knowledge System for Social Development

Knowledge generated by research is the basis of sustainable social development. In this regard, there are dimensions merit attentions: placing knowledge, including high-level scientific knowledge, at the service of development; converting knowledge in all its forms, into value via applications and impact assessment; sharing good practices to ensure wide spread benefits; creates new knowledge, primarily in engineering, medicine and natural sciences; creating of human capital, production of skills, individuals learning in the labour force to be used in innovation; formation of new product markets; creating and changing organizations needed for the development of new fields of innovation, for example, enhancing entrepreneurship to create new firm and entrepreneurship to diversify existing firms, creating new research organizations, policy agencies etc; networking through markets and other mechanism, including interactive learning between different organizations. Research in higher education will assist in meeting national developmental

challenges especially in the following areas; Lastly, educational research brings about overall development and progress in the field of education. Development and progress come as a result of the advances and accomplishments in a particular field. Everynow and then, research break new grounds, which help to bring about development and progress. Agreeing with Nworgu, 2006, much of the development and progress that have been recorded globally, would not have been possible.

- Poverty (hunger in particular),
- Ill health (including HIV and AIDs),
- Lack of decent shelter,
- Unemployment,
- Environmental degradation,
- Substandard communication system,
- Illiteracy and non-achievement of universal education,
- Gender inequality,

Research is indeed an asset for the quality of training not only the training of academics and researches to be, but the training of all sorts of highly-qualified technicians, whose knowledge will remain relevant on a long-term basis. The University is best positioned to link up with the world scientific community, and with the advancement of knowledge, it is most capable of doing whatever basic research is necessary. A complementary task for Universities is the continuing education of staff in productive sectors. Research gives institutional credibility to the establishments. Many Universities deliver good teaching, but research is a label which makes a notable difference. High qualified human resources are the main asset for development. The development of human resources is based on quality higher education, and research and development is one of the drivers of quality higher education. Indigenous knowledge can be used for economic development when mainstreamed through formal research and development. Research and statistics and indicators provide developed countries, as well as developing countries with vital information for policy formulation and decision making, assessment of performance, monitoring and evaluation of progress, and making predictions about future trends and identification of priorities. Research helps to understand the strength, weaknesses and potential opportunities for development, and to compare between countries.

In the context of developing countries, research and development statistics are specifically needed to identify highly skilled personnel, the type of work they do, the institution and sector they work for and whether their work is in line with the national policy and their priorities. Research and development are not only important in international comparison, but are also essential in guiding policy-makers in developing and targeting new policies, ensuring a certain standard of performance and building up a sense of accountability. Research activities are a particularly important source of ideas for follow-up research, since they reflect common challenges as well as distinctive concerns; they provide a good sense of the problems and challenges that are shared across geographical boundaries and historical contexts. Research leads to the establishment of new product markets. It encourages creative organizations with interactive learning amongst institutions. It paves way/creates enabling institutions which facilitate innovation, sound

environmental and safety regulations. It encourages consultancy services for technology transfer.

Why Developing Countries like Nigeria need Research in Higher Education

The need for investments dedicated to building a proper basis for higher education research, until recently has not been widely recognized by governments in developing countries or by external funding agencies. Some even argue that relevant research may be better done internationally, and that developing countries should rely on research findings produced elsewhere rather than invest in local research. Naturally, all countries as agreed by Kearney (2010) need to draw upon international research findings. She agreed that developing countries with a weak national research community have fewer opportunities to identify, adapt and make use of new knowledge. In many countries, especially the third world countries, sadly, children still die from diseases that could easily be prevented through the use of internationally available knowledge. Obviously, the understanding of various problems and their underlying factors is an important task for research. Increasing agricultural production for example, is more likely to result from new knowledge, than from finding better land, negotiating terms for the exploitation of natural resource, including mineral resources attractive to foreign investors requires scientific data collection and analysis, and local problem formulation is needed in order to choose strategies for growth, for education and for international relations. It is agreed that qualified analytical capacity must at least be in place for countries like Nigeria to design their own development strategies, sometimes referred to as "Poverty Reduction Strategies" (PRS) to be used as "ownership"-based frame works for development cooperation. Research work is needed for this. As the knowledge society continues to develop, market relations based on knowledge production increasingly permeate all aspects and institutions of society. The Universities are expected to find solutions to such problem through research.

Conclusion

In the present era of knowledge-driven economy and the knowledge-based society, knowledge policy-including policy regarding science and technology as well as knowledge management and tacit knowledge is crucial. Developing countries like Nigeria must find appropriate positions and strategies to cope with changes and to take advantage of this. Research on the research system itself, which must include knowledge production, innovation and knowledge utilization, offers this type of opportunity.

Recommendations

Higher education institutions can and do make a significant contribution to economic, social and cultural development. In a globalized economy, the relevance of the various activities conducted in those institutions is growing in importance and is subjected to increasing scrutiny. If countries like Nigeria want to be globally competitive and have a robust economy in the 21st century:

- (1) There should be proper funding for revitalizing the Universities and the education system by the Federal Government.
As suggested by (Nwagu and Umar 2012) there is need to set up research and development units by companies operating in Nigeria. This will go a long way to discontinue our young lecturers from migrating to South Africa to do research and to make our Universities compete with the best in the world.
- (2) There is need for higher education policies to enhance the individual's capacity to conduct independent and predictive research.
- (3) Higher education, Universities in particular should lead in the conduct of technology-directed and innovative/creative researchers who are locally responsive and globally competitive.
- (4) Kearney (2010) has recommended that successful development of research capacity in Universities should involve the renovation of professions in order to solve developmental problems and take advantage of new opportunities; it should also involve the creation of new developmental framework for societies and countries based on their own particularities.
In order to create successful research Universities, in Kearney (2010) suggests that
- (5) Assessment procedures need to be defined in order to guarantee high quality staffing, there should be clear criteria for the institutional organization of research universities, and research universities should strive for involvement in research and development institutions.

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